

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5402

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

S E C R E T SANA 3526

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, YE, YS

SUBJECT: CUBAN AND SOVIET COMBAT ROLE IN SOUTH YEMEN

1. WE NOTE FROM VARIOUS REMARKS IN CABLES AND LETTERS THAT WASHINGTON AGENCIES APPEAR TO REMAIN SKEPTICAL OF A CUBAN AND SOVIET ROLE IN THE FIGHTING IN ADEN AND ARE ALSO SKEPTICAL THAT ADDITIONAL CUBANS AND SOVIET FORCES HAVE BEEN BROUGHT IN LARGE NUMBERS INTO YEMEN IN THE LAST MONTH.

2. WE HAVE, OF COURSE, TRIED TO PIN DOWN SUCH QUESTIONS AS BEST WE COULD FROM SOURCES IN THE YAR.

3. IN THE COURSE OF NORMAL CONTEXT WITH THIRD COUNTRY DIPLOMATS HERE IN SANA, WE FIND THAT IN EVERY CASE OUR COLLEAGUES HERE CITE DISPATCHES FROM THEIR EMBASSIES IN ADEN DESCRIBING A SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE. THE FIRST SECRETARY OF THE
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PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA PROVIDED US WITH LENGTHY DESCRIPTIONS OF THIS ROLE WHICH HE SAID WAS BASED ENTIRELY ON REPORTS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM HIS EMBASSY IN ADEN. FRENCH, WEST GERMAN, BRITISH, ITALIAN, IRAQI, EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN COLLEAGUES IN SANA HAVE ALL SAID THE SAME THING.

4. WE HAVE ALSO PRESSED SAUDIA AND YEMEN OFFICIALS WITH ACCESS TO INTELLIGENCE TO PROVIDE US WITH DETAILS OF INTERROGATIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE FROM DEFECTORS FROM THE SOUTH AND WE HAVE ON MORE OCCASSIONS THAN ONE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF QUERYING AND CROSS-QUERYING THESE DEFECTORS TO PIN DOWN STORIES OF SOVIET AND CUBAN PARTICIPATION. ALI ABDALLAH SALIH TOLD MILATT AND MYSELF ON JULY 12 THAT BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE THOUSAND MILITARY DEFECTORS ARE IN THE YAR AND 1700 CIVILIANS. BUT HE ALSO SAID HE KNEW ALL HE NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLES IN THE FIGHTING. "IT IS CONFIRMED," HE SAID. "THEY SHIFTED THE FIGHT AGAINST SALIH RUBAYI ALI, THEY FLEW THE PLANES, THEY MANNED THE SHIPS, THEY FOUGHT WITH THE MILITIA, THEY FIRED THE ARTILLERY. WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED?" AS IN THE CASE OF EVERYONE ELSE TO WHOM I RAISED THIS QUESTION, I TOLD ALI ABDALLAH SALIH WE NEEDED EYE-WITNESS REPORTS AND CREDIBLE DETAIL NOT ONLY TO ESTABLISH THE FACT THAT THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS ACTUALLY TOOK PART IN THE FIGHTING BUT TO DEFINE THE EXTENT OF THEIR ROLE. OUR CONCLUSION, HOWEVER, IS THAT SAUDIS AND YEMENIS HERE REGARD THIS QUESTION AS REDUNDANT. WHEN I RAISED IT ON 18 JULY WITH ALI MUSALLIM AND SAUDI MILATT SALIH HUDAYAN, HE INDICATED THAT HE WAS MORE CONCERNED WITH CULLING THROUGH THE DEFECTORS TO SEE WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN SENT AS SPIES TO GAIN INFORMATION ON SAUDI AND YEMENI PLANS TO USE THESE TROOPS AND CIVILIANS AGAINST PDRY. SOVIET AND YEMEN CONCERN WAS FIRST OF
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ALL ORDER OF BATTLE OF UNITS FACING YAR AND IS NOW COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE AND PERSONNEL FOR INFILTRATION MISSIONS.

5. I AM NOT SURE, THEREFORE, WE ARE GOING TO GET THE EYE-WITNESS REPORTS OR OTHER EVIDENCE THAT WILL DEFINE THE SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLES IN THE FIGHTING OR THE EXTENT OF RE-INFORCEMENT, BUT TO UNDERSCORE POINT MADE IN EARLIER CABLE, THE UNIVERSAL CONVICTION THAT SOVIET AND CUBAN PARTICIPATED IS WEIGHTY EVIDENCE IN A SOCIETY WHICH DEPENDS ON WORD OF MOUTH FOR MUCH OF ITS INFORMATION AND HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH HUNDREDS OF DEFECTORS. WE CONSIDER REPORT OF PARTICIPATION TO BE CONFIRMED BUT WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR MORE EVIDENCE AND DETAIL.
RANSOM

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